DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 240 466 CG 017 298

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TITLE Training Couples in Communication Linkages: An Empirical Study in Maximizing Family Energy through Understanding Communication Processes.
PUB DATE Oct 83
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Family Relations (St. Paul, MN, October 11-15, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; Family Relationship; *Interpersonal Communication; Interpersonal Competence; *Models; Program Descriptions; *Skill Development; *Training

ABSTRACT

The traditional model of communication (sender-message-channel-receiver, SMCR) treats communication as a product rather than a process of interrelated elements of interaction. The SMCR model identifies communication skills, attitudes, knowledge, and sociocultural positions as important factors affecting interactions. According to this model, the channel for transmission of messages is any of the five senses. By contrast, the Human Communication Model (HCM) uses a principles and skills approach to help individuals understand how they can influence their own lives and relationships while interacting with others. The HCM defines communication as the creation of meaning within a perceiver in response to internal and external stimuli, and the transmission of signals to others which represent personal meanings. The HCM assumes each individual is the center of his/her world, communication is an organizational function, human motivation is self-actualizing, and principles and skill influence the flow of stimuli within and between people. The second part of this paper describes a 10-week couples enrichment program in which the HMC model was implemented to help them understand communication processes through: (1) discussion of major themes of communication, e.g., creating meaning, principles, process, superverbal communication, listening, understanding, speaking, relationships, and total encounter; and (2) skill development exercises, e.g., getting acquainted, sharing, creating meaning, dimensions of being, relationships, professional communication, and closure. Each of the discussion themes and skill exercises is described separately. Detailed diagrams of the two communication models are also provided. (BL)

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TRAINING COUPLES IN COMMUNICATION LINKAGES: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN MAXIMIZING FAMILY ENERGY THROUGH UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION PROCESSES

Presented in
Education and Enrichment Section
National Council on Family Relations
Annual Meeting 1983
St. Paul, Minnesota

CG 017298

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Training Couples in Communication Linkages: An Empirical Study in Maximizing Family Energy Through Understanding Communication Processes

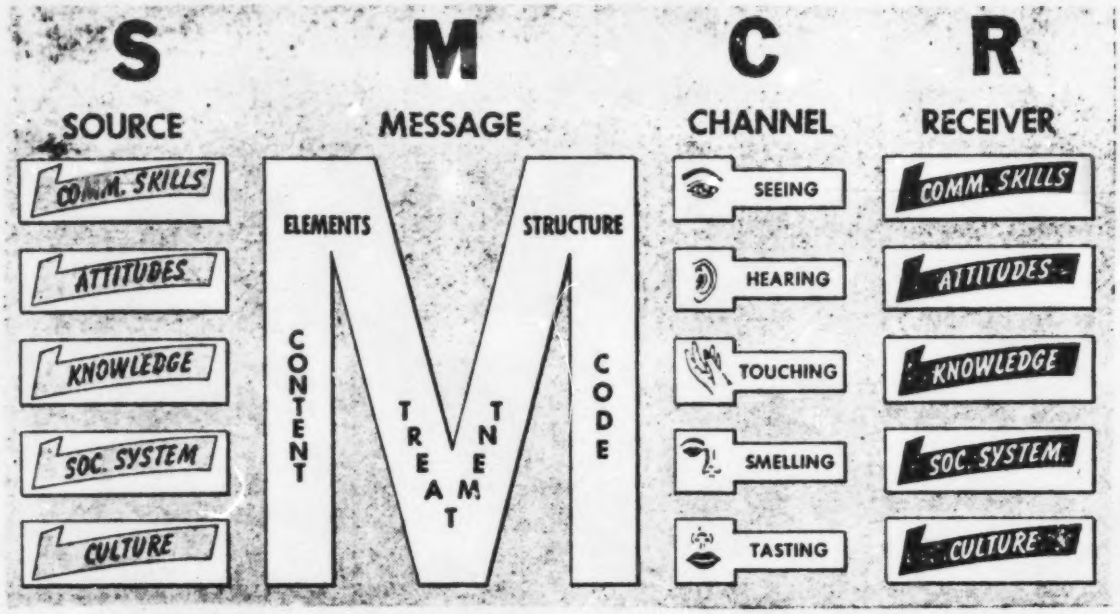
Communication has been addressed as a process in almost all the textbooks written on the subject; however, it has been treated as a product. In various textbooks, each chapter addresses one or more elements of interaction but they are not interrelated for an understanding about process. John Pauly (1977) calls for a new model to counteract the negative influence the current traditional model has on understanding human beings in interpersonal communication. He states:

> From one textbook to another the basic model of communication remains the same: Some form of information theory for the sender--message--receiver diagram, behaviorism for an explanation of why people respond the way they do to communication stimuli, and general semantics for a scientific philosophy of language. Communication, according to this model, is the process by which people turn their ideas and feelings into a common symbolic currency and transmit them to others.

A new model (called the Human Communication Model--HCM) has been developed which uses a principles and skills approach to help individuals understand how they can influence their own lives and relationships while interacting with others. A brief comparison between the old model and the new model (HCM) will help show how the principles and skills approach allows for a deeper understanding of communication process and how individuals can then make choices on how they have an influence in the interaction. This new model was used in the training program for couples.

David K. Berlo's (1960) work has given the greatest description to the traditional model and is referred to as the sender-message-channel-receiver (SMCR) model (see Diagram 1).

Diagram 1. A Model of the Ingredients in Communication

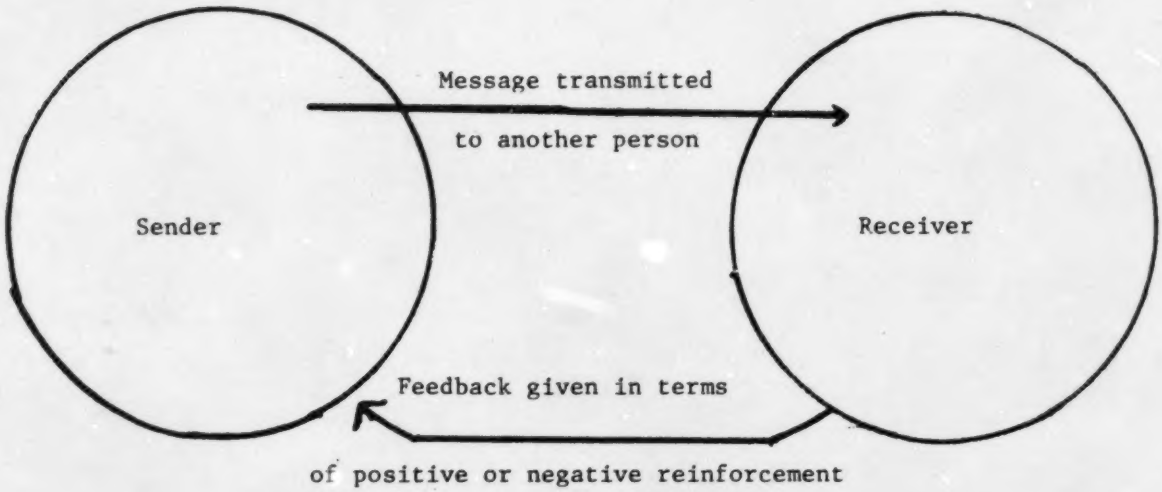


There are five communication skills, for both the sender and receiver, which are seen as important in interpersonal communication in the SMCR model: thinking, speaking, listening, writing and reading. Attitudes, knowledge and socio-cultural positions are also recognized as factors which effect how the sender and receiver interact with one another. The channel for the transmission of messages from one person to another are the five senses of taste, touch, sight, sound and smell.

The SMCR model (Berlo, 1960) has been elaborated out of the work of Shannon and Weaver (1949) who developed a mathematical model of communication which included these elements: 1) source, 2) transmitter, 3) signal, 4) receiver, and 5) destination. The SMCR model also has been influenced by the stimulus response work of B. F. Skinner and others (Berlo, 1960).

For comparative purposes the traditional model (SMCR) could be diagramed as:

Diagram 2. Interaction dynamics of interpersonal communication-- a simplified SMCR model.



The new communication model--HCM--for interpersonal interaction has a definition which was developed in 1978 by Strong and Sorenson (Strong, 1983) to give greater clarity to the processes of interaction. The definition of communication is stated as the following:

Human communication is:

(1) the creation of meaning

(2) within a perceiver

(3) in response to internal stimuli from the self

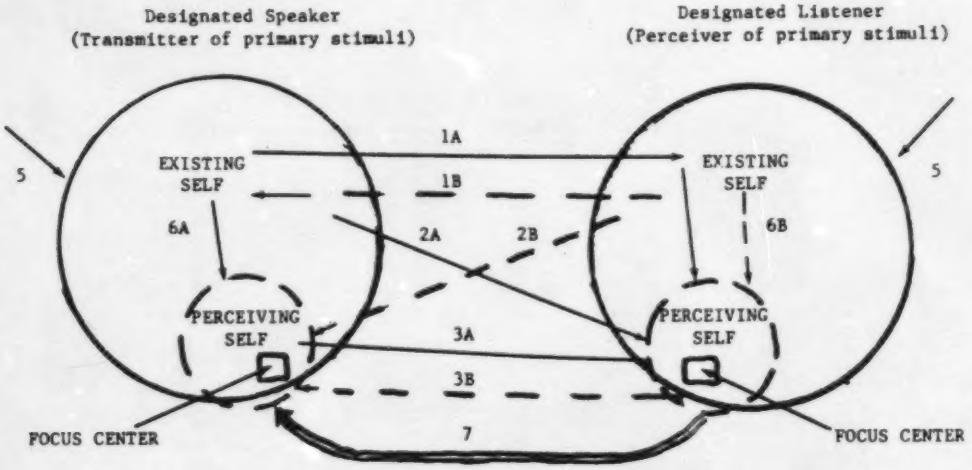
(4) and external stimuli from others and the environment, and

(5) the transmission of signals to others which represent personal meanings.

This new model places four of the five aspects of interaction within each human being as a perceiver of the messages. Many individuals have indicated the need to shift attention to the human being as the center of the communication process (e.g., Frankl, 1967; Watzlawick, et.al., 1967; Kantor and Lehr, 1975; Ozaki, 1975; Baskin and Bruno, 1977; Dillon, 1977; and Pauly, 1977).

The new model for showing processes of communication interaction--HCM--is shown in Diagram 3. (Strong, 1983, p. 87).

Diagram 3. A new Interpersonal Communication Model--HCM--with a Designated Speaker and a Designated Listener Representing a Partial Flow of Stimuli.



Line 1A represents supraverbal stimuli being transmitted from the existing self of the designated speaker to the existing self of the designated listener. This stimuli must be reflected through the listener's perceiving self for processing.

Line 1B represents the secondary supraverbal stimuli transmission from the existing self of the listener's world to the speaker's existing self.

Line 2A represents non-verbal stimuli from the speaker's existing self that is processed through sensory receptors in the listener's perceiving self.

Line 2B represents secondary non-verbal stimuli transmission from the listener's existing self as processed by the speaker's perceiving self.

Line 3A represents verbal transmission of perceived self states from the speaker's world to the perceiving self of the listener.

Line 3B represents a secondary verbal transmission of perceived meaning from the listener's perceiving self to the speaker's perceiving self.

Lines 4 and 5 represent external stimuli to both the listener's and speaker's world from a temporal and transcendental environment, respectively. Temporal stimilu go through the perceiving self, transcendental stimuli enter the existing self but are processed through the perceiving self.

Lines 6A and 6B represent internal stimuli from the existing self of the speaker to the perceiving self of the speaker as primary stimuli and from the existing self of the listener to the perceiving self of the listener as secondary stimuli. Current images of the speaker's world held by the listener may be a primary source of stimuli.

Line 7 represents a verbal form of verification feedback sent from the listener to the speaker for the confirmation or clarification of the speaker's own perspective about self.

The primary stimuli sources are the solid lines from the speaker to the listener with the designation of the sender as the speaker and the receiver as the listener in this diagram. The double curved lines (#7) from the listener to the speaker represents verification feedback--a principle and skill to help assure understanding over and beyond reinforcement about the speaker's message.

The new model also includes a level of stimuli transmission--supraverbal signals--which have a powerful impact on understanding one another and relationship development. This level of stimuli is long overdue in being openly recognized and developed for interpersonal communication. The HCM model shows more clearly the interaction between communication than the SMCR model. The existing self, in the HCM approach, represents the sum of personal meanings stored as values, beliefs, personal theories and attitudes. The perceiving self represents the processing capacity of each person to deal with the internal and external stimuli which has been focused upon. The focus center represents the selection of a limited amount of stimuli to be processed from all the internal/external stimuli being received by both the designated listener and speaker.

The SMCR model has been developed with the implication of what the sender's message does to the receiver--stimulus ➡ response and the linear mathematical model of causation. The more accurately the sender can encode the message and the more accurately the receiver can decode the message results in the greatest fidelity of the transfer of information. The new HCM approach does not allow for cause and effect, but places emphasis upon principles and skills and how they influence the flow of stimuli within and between partners in interaction. The HCM approach deals with the stimuli flow versus information transmission between partners. (The HCM approach suggests

that only machines transmit information while humans transmit stimuli in various levels of organized messages. Machines don't transmit feelings.)

Four Basic Assumptions of the Human Communication Model

First, Each human being is the center of any known world to the self. Each person creates his/her own private world which is unique to oneself but can be shared with others. Individual's often take on a "one-world" point of view--if someone disagrees with another he/she is mad or bad. Understanding the separateness, but commonness, between two different individuals allows for a much greater exchange of thoughts and feelings as the flow of stimuli within and between partners takes place. Recognizing the concept that each person is the center of any known world allows for speakers and listeners to determine whether the stimuli has internal or external origin and each can bring different principles and skills into action for completing the greatest understanding of one another.

Second, Communication is an organizational function. Intrapersonal communication is the process of each individual organizing personal stimuli into images and then ordering these images into relationships with one another which become the personal meanings. New stimuli from self, others or the environment are processed in terms of rightfulness of fit for a status quo personal world, the possibility for enhancement of images about self and others through change in personal meanings (ordered relationships), or rejected as irrelevant data sets for one's personal world.

Interpersonal communication is the process of transmitting signals to others with the attempt to have a personal world understand by someone else, to help others develop similar patterns of organization within their personal worlds, and/or to maintain a given relationship between communicants. Much of what is organized within a personal world has been borrowed from the

orders created and shared by other individuals. Shared meanings are when ordered relationships between two, or more, individuals are highly similar.

Third, Human motivation lies in the power to be--to reach a potential. To Become an actualized self in terms of physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, asthetic and social dimensions gives the drive for interaction. Few, if any, ever reach the full potential that lies within. Organizing and reorganizing meanings within one's personal world then reinforces a striving towards a higher level of Being. Some experiences in life stifle one's ability and desire to grow and change. Holding on to the status quo organization is where energy is directed. Other experiences result in greater determination to change, grow, and develop new orders of meaning.

To fully Be is to have relationship between self and other. This gives rise to energy for interpersonal communication. This drive to Be is uniquely experienced within the private world for each human being. This gives the agency and responsibility for interaction to each person, per se. Each chooses how and where to express individual drive and it all relates to the meaning within each human being.

Fourth, Principles and skills influence the flow of stimuli within and between human beings. The identification of principles which influence how stimuli messages are transmitted, received, and processed becomes a major concern for understanding the human communication process. Principles have their attending skills. Principles are the cognitive understanding of how one interaction influences another where skills are the capacity to act on specific principles to affect desired changes.

All too often our work on interpersonal communication stops at the cognitive level. Skills need to be developed that can be transferred from one setting and relationship to another (Bochner, 1978). A three phase

approach to teaching/learning principles and skills of communication has been developed (Strong, 1981) to assist the communicants to making selected choices on how to interact in interpersonal relations to maximize understanding in various situational settings.

With the presentation of the theoretical constraints of a principles and skills approach to helping couples understand communication process, our attention will turn to the training program.

Couples Communication Enrichment Program

Ten themes of communication process, each with several principles and skills, were the basis of a ten week workshop for couples to participate in. Each three hour session consisted of one to one and a half hours of discussion/presentation of the major principles in each theme and the remaining time being used in small group structured exercises for skill development. Small groups were designated so that partners would not be in a group together and each group was to be a common set of participants throughout the workshop.

A pre-assessment was made by each individual for a self perception score. (A six month follow-up is planned for each individual's post-assessment perceptions.) A pre-assessment of communication skills was taken followed by a post-assessment at the close of the workshop.

Each participant was encouraged to read text materials which correspond with the ten themes of the workshop. They were also encouraged to do some assignments of a written and discussion nature to help them better understand the concepts. The ten themes with the major principles came in this order:

1. Creating Meaning. This theme included the principles of image-building, separation of worlds and verification feedback. The purpose for this theme is to help individuals understand how they each develop separate personal

worlds and how to differentiate their experiences from each other for sharing perspectives and giving/receiving understanding.

2. General Principles. This theme included the principles of: (a) meaning lies within individuals and not in the words they use, (b) patterns give stability to a relationship and are a source of intrasystem communication, (c) individuals cannot not transmit stimuli nor not be perceived, and (d) each person transmits relational feelings along with content messages to one another. This last principle has greatest emphasis placed upon it to help individuals sense the influence of feelings held have on the communication interaction whether or not they are directly discussed. Negative feelings create a blockage in processing content stimuli and need to be cleared first.

3. Communication Process. This theme involved a presentation of the interpersonal model (HCM) to help show all the flow of stimuli and how to separate out what perceptions and feelings belong to whom. Emphasis is also placed on verification feedback and how it could be used in helping the speaker to understand his/her own world better through the feedback of a listener who tunes into all three levels of stimuli.

4. Superverbal communication. This theme involves a discussion and presentation of how supraverbal stimuli is transmitted and can be received and reflected upon to gain greater congruency with the existing self of the speaker. Ways to cultivate this "feeling" form of transmission are discussed.

5. Listening Processes. This theme involves six barriers and five facilitators in interaction which influence the flow of stimuli within and between partners. Barriers are viewed as to how they distort and impede understandings and facilitators are discussed as to how they amplify and clarify understandings.

6. Understanding oneself. This theme involves ways to learn to listen to oneself--most accurately through the help of another person--so that internal

states-of-being can be clarified and worked toward desired changes. Here is where the interdependence between intrapersonal and interpersonal communication process becomes pronounced. If internal states are not met to satisfactory levels, then internal stimuli is often a source of meaning to use in judging/controlling external stimuli from others. Seven areas, called dimensions of being, are used to help individuals understand their emotional needs as related to interactions with others.

7. Speaking Processes. This theme involved the actions and attitudes which formed barriers and facilitators on sending signals to allow a partner to help oneself come to understand oneself better--those searching, personal meanings which are not completely resolved nor controlled. This gives emphasis to the need for taking a risk of sharing personal data that may be viewed as areas wherein one is vulnerable.

8. Relationship Resolution. This theme involves several principles to help work toward relationship resolution between couples for maximized growth, enjoyment and individual development. Relationship assessment is one principle to help clarify for both individuals how they are feeling towards self, partner and the relationship. A family council is a principle to keep needed perceptions and feelings understood. Several principles for bringing negative feelings into focus for change-- or to reduce the development of negative feelings--are discussed. The need for forgiveness at two levels is discussed for the benefit of both parties where one (or both) have been offended.

9. Conflict Resolution. This theme presents a conflict resolution model with six steps to work toward resolution of conflicts at the intrapersonal relational needs versus the content differences as perceived by each partner. This theme involves a review of all the principles as they influence interaction of a contesting nature between one another. The six steps are to help structure interaction to assure the greatest understandings of self and the other as new

orders of meaning are created with respect to one another.

10. Total Encounter. This theme involves processing of unfinished thoughts, perceptions and feelings within oneself as related to self image and others. One set of unprocessed feelings and perceptions is that of errors one has made and not cleared up appropriately. These are often rationalized and they require constant energy to keep them denied or justified. The other set is emotional feelings which are held about others also robbing energy from desired relationships. A process of working through both types of unfinished business within ones private world is given to release energies to be directed toward greater encounter of self and partner for more satisfying relationships.

There are also ten structured skill exercises to help each person gain the skills which follow the principles governing the flow of stimuli within and between partners. This experiential understanding of the process is an essential part of communication. A cognitive understanding without a skill for implementing it is of little value in making changes for personal lives and relationships. The ten structured exercises are presented with the purpose of each:

1. Getting Acquainted and Trust Walk. Some sharing of personal backgrounds and interests in the workshop starts to build a bond between members. The trust walk helps individuals to develop more trust in the partners. The bonding of trust between group members is essential for skill development to take place. Where trust and caring are minimal there is minimal skill development.

2. Sharing Positive and Negative Experiences. Each person shares a positive or negative experience while other group members practice separation of worlds and offering verification feedback. These two skills underlie the effectiveness of all other skill development. Participants are encouraged to

practice these skills and assist one another's development of these skills in every structured experience.

3. Creation of Meaning. Participants continue to focus on verification feedback and separation of worlds as they come to understand more how the meanings they share are transmitted in response to specifically perceived environments.

4. Assessing States-of-Being I. This structured exercise is to develop the skill of using supraverbal stimuli. A brief explanation of the procedures will help show the nature of this skill. Each participant takes a few moments to get in touch with whatever thoughts or feelings are going on internally. Then one person becomes a "focus person" who continues to think and feel about self states. All other members turn attention to the focus person and wait for impressions about that person's state-of-being to develop. These members share their impressions without the focus person saying anything until all others have shared all their perceptions. The focus person can then respond to impression of others and/or express thoughts and feelings experienced that were not picked-up reception of supraverbal stimuli by the other members. Each person has an opportunity to be the "focus" person.

5. Out of Sight/In Sound. This structured experience is to develop the skill of sharing ones positive feelings about the other group members. Each participant has the opportunity to hear what positive things others view about him/her. This interaction allows for verification feedback for understanding to take place after the focus person responds to the positive comments.

6. Dimensions of Being. This structured exercise is to help each participant gain a deeper understanding of a selected state of being they express. Good listeners can help the speakers (in their respective turns) to come to deeper understanding and appreciation of self. Each person can also experience the process of deeper self understanding as a result of allowing

others to listen to help each person gain greater meaning.

7. Assessing States-of-Being II. This exercise combines the dimension of being and first assessing states-of-being experiences. This gives further experience in learning about oneself (and others) while increasing ones ability to reflect supraverbal stimuli into the understanding process.

8. Relationship Assessment. The purpose of this exercise is to experience the process of openly sharing feelings related to relationships interactions. Coming to appreciate the outcome of positive feelings and negative reactions being resolved gives courage to process feelings more openly.

9. Communicating Professionally. This skill exercise is to help develop ones ability to share perceptions about others as they are related to one's personal world. This exercise helps individuals to understand that compliments and criticisms lie within the world of the originator and can be used personally only as related to the other person's world.

10. Preparing for Closure. This structured skill exercise is to help group members to work through thoughts and feelings about relationships which terminate for various reasons--friends moving, close of a class, death, divorce/separation. Emphasis is placed on starting to process feelings and perceptions of an internal nature that are often avoided and denied.

The formation of each structured exercise group is done on a random basis with the exception of placement of partners. Partners are placed in groups away from each other to minimize the patterned relations they would carry into skill development. Partners are encouraged to go through similar exercises with each other after they have experienced the skill exercise in the assigned group.

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